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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000609

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: JAFARI DRAWS SUNNI LEADERSHIP INTO CRISIS  
MANAGEMENT AT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

REF: BAGHDAD 595

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Prime Minister Jafari drew leaders from across the political spectrum into his crisis management process by convening a new advisory group late on February 25. For the first time since the Samarra tragedy, the Sunni Arab leadership directly engaged the top tier of the GOI on a joint plan to decrease tensions in Iraq. Whereas President Talabani's meeting earlier in the week saw a Tawafuq Front boycott and only broad statements of good will (reftel), this session had full attendance and a long list of specific initiatives. Jafari said that he will increase troop deployments at hotspots around the country and deploy Ministry of Interior (MOI) forces away from Sunni Arab areas. The Sunni Arab Tawafuq Front matched that concession with an agreement to submit a list of damaged mosques to a joint government-chaired committee that will investigate conflicting reports on the scope of damage to mosques.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT CONTINUED: Jafari pledged to convene this new advisory group regularly, and he closed the evening with a joint press appearance alongside the Sadrists, Sunni Arab leaders, and key Shia personalities. Nobody wants a civil war, Jafari announced, and all are united against terrorists who wish to incite one. Jafari also proclaimed that the meeting had produced a wide range of proposals for the way forward, which will be considered on the agenda of its next Ministerial Committee for National Security (MCNS) meeting. The Ambassador had pushed Jafari to convene the advisory group in the first place and will encourage it to meet again to translate its proposals into actions. The advisory group also saw an unusually blunt push by the Kurdish leadership, Allawi, and Adil Abd al-Mehdi for redoubling efforts to form a national unity government without red lines on any group's involvement. The Samarra crisis cannot be detached from the government deadlock, they pointed out. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

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After Initial Reluctance, A Wide Call for Calm  
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¶3. (C) The PM drew leaders from across the political spectrum into his crisis management process by convening an advisory committee late on February 25. The meeting brought the Tawafuq Front into the decision-making process after Sunni Arab leadership in the past week had appeared to suspend participation in such meetings. The Ambassador had requested that Jafari convene this group, and, after considerable reluctance, the PM did so. Jafari nevertheless failed to invite Transitional National Assembly (TNA) Speaker Hachim al-Hasani, a sign of continuing Shia coalition grudges against Sunni leaders and of a sectarian desire to ensure that the majority in attendance were from their own

coalition. Once convened, all attendees repeatedly denounced sectarian violence and emphasized their determination to avoid civil war. Most notably, Sadrist leader Salam al-Maliki said that it is un-Islamic to attack mosques and denounced as an infidel anyone who undertakes such an act. For his part, Tawafuq leader Adnan al-Duleimi told the group that he believes only terrorists are benefiting from Iraq's strife and only terrorists could have been behind the Samarra attack. Da'wa leader Jawad al-Maliki told the group that they need a broad solution to a crisis that was brought on by years of "accumulated attacks and a waterfall of blood," not just the one attack in Samarra.

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Jafari Government Harshly Criticized  
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¶4. (C) The meeting began with mutual recriminations when Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Tariq al-Hashemi delivered a scathing criticism of the government's handling of the crisis. He said that he had told Jafari to impose a curfew immediately after the tragedy but that the government demurred from a decision and then failed to protect Sunni religious sites when attacks on them were predictable. He looked at Interior Minister Bayan Jabr, who was sitting directly across the table from him, and said, "Our people have no confidence in your forces." Hashemi accused the MOI of assassinations and raids against the Sunni Arab community and then called for all MOI forces to be kept away from Sunni areas. Hashemi gestured down the table to Defense Minister Sa'adun Duleimi and denounced him for failing in an earlier press conference to present to the media a full and accurate picture of the damage to Sunni holy sites. Lastly, he denounced Shia media outlets that he said have broadcast

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incitement since the attack. Assyrian leader Yunadam Kanna added to the complaints against the government by questioning why the Samarra Chief of Police has not yet resigned after this catastrophe. Even SCIRI leader Muhammad Taqi al-Mawla criticized the government for failing to implement recently passed laws for counter-terrorism and the protection of holy shrines.

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Sunni Arabs and Shia Coalition Leaders Trade Insults  
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¶5. (C) Hashemi's remarks provoked the strongest reaction, and by the end of his harangue the leadership around the table was visibly uncomfortable. Bayan Jabr, openly rolling his eyes and throwing his hands up in frustration during Hashemi's remarks, forcefully defended the MOI and denounced the Sunni Arab community for failing to acknowledge terrorists in their midst. "Mosques are being used to hold weapons and explosive belts and when they are raided all we hear are condemnations that we are raiding religious sites," Jabr said. Jabr then referred to a recent MOI raid on IIP headquarters that had netted illegal weapons. Jafari defended his decision not to impose a curfew immediately after the Samarra explosion, stating that the vast majority of the cabinet opposed a curfew, believing that holding back the public would lead them to turn on the government.

¶6. (C) Da'wa Tanzim al-Iraq leader Khudeir al-Khuzai denounced incitement in the media and referred to Hashemi in his criticism of leaders who "work in a brotherly fashion in some meetings and then transform into ranting generals on the satellite networks." By that point, Hashemi had denounced Khuzai for media incitement of his own. Jafari cut Hashemi off and asked him to wait his turn to speak. When that turn came, Hashemi rejected the implication that anyone in his office had attacked a U.S. soldier and defended his possession of heavy weaponry.

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## A Heated Debate Over Raids and Detainees

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¶7. (C) Hashimi and Adnan al-Duleimi sparked a lengthy argument when they called for the government to halt nighttime raids and to release detainees in order to defuse the crisis. Hashemi denounced conditions in the prisons and said that the Ambassador and others had failed to follow through on repeated promises that detainees would be released. Mithal al-Alusi denounced the call for a complete prisoner release as totally unreasonable given the number of criminals and terrorists in detention. Jabr admitted that an overburdened judiciary is failing to try cases and acquit the accused with enough speed. Talabani said he is mystified by the complaints over nighttime raids because he personally had ordered a halt to such operations weeks ago. The only raids taking place should be based on a judicial order, he said. Jabr did not explain the nighttime raids but claimed that judicial orders sometimes need to be obtained ex post facto for actions against an imminent threat.

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## A Renewed Push for a National Unity Government

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¶8. (C) Several leaders used the meeting to renew the push for a national unity government. Leading SCIRI figure Adel Abd al-Mehdi told the group that Iraq is in the midst of a crisis of confidence that can be solved only by a national unity government. He urged the quick formation of one so that all groups can be in positions of responsibility. "No red lines" should be allowed to hamper that process, Mehdi added. Fadhila Leader Nadim al-Jabiri told the group that he thinks they can turn the Samarra tragedy into a push toward unity -- a remark seconded and praised by Hashemi, Ayad Allawi, and Masud Barzani. Barzani spoke emotionally in his pitch for a unity government, warning the group that civil war would be a disaster, to which he and Talabani could attest.

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## A List of Key Recommendations

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¶9. (C) Jafari closed the gathering by reading the list of suggestions that he had heard and noted. He promised to use the ideas as a basis for discussion in his next MCNS meeting and pledged to reconvene the advisory group within days. He listed the following ideas from the meeting, each followed by its proponent:

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-- Declare all those killed in the violence since the Samarra tragedy martyrs. They would be eligible for all related benefits. (Adnan Dulaimi)

-- Immediately set aside money and bring together engineers to rebuild damaged shrines and offices. The Sunni and Shia Waqf offices could potentially lead this effort. (Yunadam Kanna and others)

-- Create a broad National Security Council, potentially drawn from the group gathered, to meet continually to fill the leadership void until a new government is formed. (Mithal al-Alusi)

-- Release prisoners who have been found innocent or have no evidence against them, focusing on those arrested or kidnapped illegally during the recent violence. Increase the number of judges to process the cases of those who remain incarcerated. (Tareq al-Hashemi, Jalal Talabani, Bayan Jabr, and others)

-- Deploy Iraqi Army and MNF-I to hot spots around the country to preserve calm and protect other shrines. Use MNF-I and MOD forces in areas where there is sensitivity

about the presence of MOI forces. (Jafari, Hashemi, and others)

-- Contact neighboring states and inform them that Iraq is in a critical situation and that they all need to play a role in securing the borders. (Ayad Allawi)

-- Draft an honor code forbidding attacks on religious sites or sectarian groups. (Salam al-Maliki)

-- Appear regularly and jointly in the media to emphasize national unity. (Khudeir al-Khuzai and others)

-- Form a committee to review all detainee files and recommend appropriate releases. (Bayan Jabr and Tariq al-Hashemi)

-- Form a committee to review the work of the MOI and MOD through a comprehensive review of actions and documents. (Bayan Jabr)

-- Enforce the counter-terrorism law and the law for the protection of holy shrines. (Muhammad Taqi al-Mawla)

-- Convene the Council of Representatives to demonstrate unity and progress. (Adnan al-Duleimi)

-- Extend the curfew to prevent further deterioration. (multiple proponents)

-- Form an investigative committee to determine who was behind both the Samarra explosion and the attacks that followed. This committee also will determine the extent of the property damage that has resulted from the violence. (multiple proponents)

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) COMMENT: This nearly three-hour session, for all its tense moments, expanded Jafari's crisis management team at a crucial moment and may have produced the frankest discussion among between Shia and Sunni Arab leaders that we have seen. It is indicative of the moment that leaders like Hashemi are condemning the Iraqi security services even as they call for them to play a greater role around the country. The PM needs national unity and a clear program of action to lead Iraq away from the brink; both began to crystallize at this meeting. Jafari's agreement to keep MOI forces out of sensitive areas could be the basis for a broad modus vivendi between the Sunni Arab leadership and the Iraqi Security Forces, particularly the National Guard. The Sunni Arab leadership still may boycott meetings in their rhetoric, but now they have joined openly the search for a way forward. The Ambassador's pressure was needed to get this meeting convened, and he will keep applying it to make sure the ideas put forward find their way onto the agenda at the next MCNS session. This group needs to keep convening, and we will ensure that it does. END COMMENT.  
KHALILZAD